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UNCLAS LIMA 002180

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL PGOV PE CI

SUBJECT: TOLEDO MAINTAINS HARD LINE ON 1995 CHILEAN ARMS

DELIVERIES TO ECUADOR

REF: A. SANTIAGO 1011

1B. SANTIAGO 1000

1C. LIMA 2061

1D. LIMA 2018

1E. SANTIAGO 660

Sensitive but Unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

11. (U) President Alejandro Toledo is maintaining the GOP's hard line on Chile's 1995 arms deliveries to Ecuador. In a declaration made on 5/10 while attending the South American Arab Summit in Brasilia, Toledo announced that the issue will not/not be resolved and there will be no/no 2x2 meetings of Defense and Foreign Ministers until Chile, "offers an explanation and issues a public apology." When asked by the press the following day to comment on Toledo's statement, Prime Minister Carlos Ferrero noted that, "When the President speaks on an issue like this ministers have nothing to add." With respect to the prospects for bilateral relations, the Prime Minister commented, "Sincerely, I don't know what will happen in the future. This is a situation that we would not have wanted to occur."

12. (U) Foreign Ministry Under Secretary for Political Affairs Oscar Maurtua defended the GOP's position in columns published in the daily "Expreso" on 5/10-11. According to Maurtua, the Peruvian Foreign Ministry sought to enlist its Chilean counterpart's cooperation in investigating the arms deliveries, but that, "Unfortunately, after undertaking all reasonable efforts through high-level representatives of both Foreign Ministries, it became clear that the same disposition did not exist on the part of the Chilean Government, thereby frustrating the possibility of a joint pronouncement that would have overcome the difficulty." Consequently, Maurtua continued, Peru had no/no choice but to issue its 4/29 communique (Ref C). He concluded that, "It is absolutely legitimate that the Government of Peru and its citizens hope for a sincere expression from Chile on these facts, not excuses manifested in a furtive nighttime visit (NOTE: a reference to then-Chilean Vice Foreign Minister Mariano Fernandez' call on then-Peruvian Ambassador Rivero in February 1995 - Refs A,C). END NOTE.) of which no more than four people had knowledge of (NOTE: A reference to then-President Alberto Fujimori's decision to keep this incident close hold - Ref C). END NOTE).

13. (SBU) COMMENT: The GOP's decision to maintain its hard line on Chile's 1995 arms deliveries to Ecuador clearly comes from the very top. The press, which enthusiastically engaged in Chile-bashing when the issue first surfaced, has tended to back-track recently and urge dialogue. Flagship daily "El Comercio," for example, published editorials on 5/5 and 5/10 welcoming former Vice Minister Fernandez' admissions (which most papers reported were encouraged by Chilean President Ricardo Lagos) and recommending that the GOP respond by renewing diplomatic consultations and the 2x2 process. "El Comercio," on 5/9, also published a full-page interview with former Peruvian Foreign Minister (and current head of the Diplomatic Academy) Jose de la Puente Radbill, who complained that the crisis has been "badly handled," and placed the blame on Prime Minister Ferrero, noting that Foreign Minister Manuel Rodriguez has been out of the picture, hospitalized with a serious bacteriological infection (NOTE: Rodriguez is still in the hospital. END NOTE). The public appears to be of two minds on the issue: a recent University of Lima poll in Lima/Callao found that 65.3 percent of respondents believed the GOP was mishandling the Chilean arms issue, while an IMA Marketing Studies poll in Lima concluded that 77.6 percent of respondents approved of Peru's demanding an apology from its southern neighbor. END COMMENT.

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